

EGREMONT GREEN COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES March 10, 2021

The meeting opened at 4:03.

Members present: Juliette Haas, Emily Eyre (co-chair), Pat Konecky (co-chair), Marj Wexler, Corinna Barnard, Robin Goldberg

Also present: Fred Gordon and Donna Gordon.

Minutes of the Feb. 10, 2021, meeting were unanimously accepted.

Community Preservation Act

Fred Gordon, a Town volunteer, introduced his work on the Housing Committee and his research into the Community Preservation Act as a possible way of raising money to build affordable housing on land already owned by the Town for that purpose. The CPA has three categories: 1) open land, which includes recreation 2) housing 3) historical structures. Funding comes in part from a surcharge on various real estate transactions. Last year 12 towns, including Stockbridge, received a dollar-dollar match from the state. Great Barrington and Lenox also received funds. In an example of how the Town might use the CPA, Fred noted that it could help pay for work on the Library that is currently being contemplated. CPA taxes would be based on assessed property values. It would eliminate the first \$100,000 in assessed value and would provide a waiver for people whose income would make it difficult to pay. In general, the tax would be less than 28 cents per \$1,000 of assessed real estate value.

Relative to the Green Committee, Fred said funds might be used for such things as a public drinking water supply in French Park and more community gardens. He said any affordable housing built with CPA funding would conform to green building standards. Other things for which CPA money could be used include preservation of historic structures (not just houses, but also things such as stone walls), ADA construction, wheel-chair-accessible trails. The contractor would be Habitat for Humanity, whose CEO told him that among the key things that are needed: 1) Town agreement to selling the land to Habitat for Humanity 2) Zoning Commission approval 3) vote to approve \$10,000 for the CPA.

Juliette recalled a previous attempt to qualify for the CPA. First came a Town meeting where it passed. But a secret ballot was also required and there it did not pass.

Several members voiced support for affordable housing. The committee passed a motion expressing its unanimous support for the CPA.

Sustainability Coordinator Report

-Municipal Vulnerability Planning (MVP) Juliette said the group is now a committee with a facilitator and a consultant and a focus on how the community will adapt to climate change.

-Battery storage for homeowners Juliette said there is grant opportunity for homeowners who would like to store energy in batteries designed for use by the grid during heavy power demand. It's described as a way for the grid to avoid using peaker plants. Solar panels are not required. Prices on the market range from \$5,000 to \$7,000 plus installation. The batteries are very heavy, so the building has to be structurally sound. They are recommended for out buildings, for instance. The difference from a generator, which runs on propane, is that power companies have the ability to tap into this battery.

Marj questioned the advantage for homeowners who don't have solar panels since the battery taps into electricity for which they pay.

Emily said the grid only uses them for "peaker" purposes, a max of 60 days a year, and won't pull from a storage battery in a crisis, such as a blackout. If the grid draws during peak time the homeowner might get some money back.

Community microgrids were also raised as another way of provided power supply resilience. Its disadvantage is that it involves the whole town, which can make them difficult to achieve, politically. But since the Town has many community solar arrays already, Juliette noted that progress has already been made in this area. She said that once the pandemic has passed, a forum on both a community microgrid as well as individual battery storage might be worthwhile. The committee was warm to that idea.

Emily has researched microgrids and recommended a good source of information: microgridknowledge.com

Pat said she was glad to be discussing microgrids because neighbors could create our own community power hub rather than putting energy back into National Grid. She noted that Pittsfield had looked into a microgrid and ultimately decided against. She said the topic tied back to Municipal Vulnerability Planning since some communities are funding safe houses during extended power outages during winter.

Peaker Plants Update

Pat said the next meeting would be at 6 pm that night. Some fliers are being provided about how to avoid using power during peak times.

No Fracked Gas in Mass is spearheading this campaign. Going back to the discussion of battery storage, Pat said that peaker plants appear to kick in on average one day a year, some days for just three hours. Some years the max has been three days. If people pull together excess energy from batteries and solar, she expected it would be more than what was needed to obviate the need for peaker plants.

Rain Barrels: Emily said that at least 40 rain barrels were sold. Having reached 40, additional barrels can be ordered without limiting ourselves to multiples of eight. Emily put the Greenagers in touch with the Great American Rain Barrel Company, and now the Greenagers' Front Lawn Food Program is integrated with TGARB, so people who purchase raised beds are offered the opportunity to also buy a rain barrel. Emily and Marj meet with Barbara Kalish on Friday to assess progress and next steps. Rain barrel delivery will be in mid-May.

Roadside Cleanup: Mild weather has been revealing all the trash on our roadsides. Marj will use Egremont Post to encourage residents to clean up their favorite roads. This year will be like last because Covid is still here. Residents will be asked to collect, separate and dispose on their own.

Pollinator Grant: The annual [Plant Something Bee-eautiful](#) program awards five grants of \$250 or \$500 to Keep Massachusetts Beautiful by planting pollinator-friendly plants in public spaces. The goal is to beautify public spaces and to restore habitat for pollinators. We will pass the info on to Abby Rogers-McKee (the Garden Club) and Elizabeth Keen (Agriculture Commission) in hopes that they will take the lead on writing the grant application, which is due July 31.

Next Generation of EGC Members

Emily led a discussion about recruiting more members via the Town newsletter. "Green Committee always open to new members, experience in Social Media particularly welcome."

Electric Vehicle Fast-Charging Station Grant

This was discussed at a Select Board earlier in the week. The grant would cover 100 percent of installation. But since there were costs that were not covered, Juliette said the Board did not pursue because funds are not appropriated.

Berkshire Edge Articles

Corinna noted that Emily's column on pill bottles was in the works.

Sharon raised the idea of column about the federal bill to shift recycling responsibility to manufacturers.

Corinna noted that Earth Day was coming up and the next column could be pegged to that.

The standing queue:

- 1) Virtual tool library – about a community effort and sharing in general.
- 2) MRF town materials and the shifts underway locally in the recycling industry.
- 3) BRTA bus routes & South County public transportation.
- 4) Rollout for rebates for EVs are back from state.
- 5) Findings of the National Grid's Green Communities program, begun in 2012. Data from these various certified communities shows the strides possible in reducing electricity consumption (renewables, conservation & efficiency). Biggest challenge is transportation (which could provide a tie-in with No. 3 & No. 4).
- 6) Plastic avoidance in the era of Covid.
- 7) Annual article about the Town's most recent "Waste Line" figures

The next meeting was scheduled for April 7 at 4pm

The meeting adjourned at 5:22.

Thanks to Marj Wexler for providing minutes during a portion of the meeting when my computer lost internet connection.

Respectfully submitted,
Corinna Barnard